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Where We Miss the Bus in Viet Nam—III

Reds Dominate Radio

By STUART ALAN ALPERIN

CPYRGHT

The story of the returnee program, the Chieu Hoi, is an excellent example of the sorry state of the Allied propaganda effort in Viet Nam.

Last March a 16-year-old boy communicated with officials in South Viet Nam that he wished to defect from the Viet Cong and return to the national fold.

The boy was to lead a Vietnamese regiment and its American advisors to one of the largest caches of Viet Cong arms uncovered by the Allies. Supplies from Red China, ammunition, mortars, mines, demolition equipment, and first aid supplies from all over the Communist world were captured.

As a reward the returnee was given 700,000 piastres, \$7000 American dollars. He was honored as a hero at a great public celebration in the Vietnamese highlands and later at his home province on the South China Sea.

Gen Co, the current defense minister, and the former minister of information were among the many dignitaries who paid homage to the young patriot.

Such instances of patriotism could not go unrecognized, even in South Viet Nam.

Although the returnee program has been in effect for a few years, it has not been very successful. Cases like the one above are rare.

Returnee stations are located in numerous provincial and district towns throughout the nation. They might be pueblo-style stucco huts or large timber cabins like the station in Ban Ma Thuot.

One of the problems with the program is its lack of aggressiveness. The Vietnamese have discovered that they cannot sit in their comfortable stations waiting for a Viet Cong to walk in and return to the nationalist cause. As a

matter of fact, there were discussions of closing many of the stations before the Summer offensive.

Within hours of the Viet Cong's turning himself in to the government authorities, news of his actions had become common knowledge among most of the Allied authorities in the area. Surely the Viet Cong, whose intelligence apparatus is woven throughout the South Vietnamese government's establishment, were aware that one of their members had defected.

Within a week after the cache was uncovered and the Saigon newspapers had reported the event, nothing else was heard of the affair.

A Vietnamese officer who was knowledgeable of the returnee's act was deeply depressed over the lack of exploitation by the Vietnamese and American propaganda practitioners.

During the Spring the morale of the Vietnamese people and American advisors was very low and increasingly depressing.

The eyes of the world were focused on the Viet Nam crisis. The act of this returnee was evidence that Viet Cong solidarity was not foolproof and that many nationalists had been impressed into the Viet Cong's service through terrorist threats.

Sadly, publicity of the affair by South Vietnamese radio facilities was practically nil.

The time to drop millions of leaflets exploiting the returnee's act was immediately after the cache of arms had been retrieved by the Allies.

When the leaflets were dropped they should have been delivered not only to Hanoi, but throughout the areas under Communist con-

trol and influence in the south.

Instead, what followed was a formal recognition of the event more than a month later in the Montagnard capital of Ban Ma Thuot.

The event was old news since it lost its impact in the swiftly moving tide of the Vietnamese conflict.

Lack of speed in exploiting the affair also gave the Viet Cong time to create a tale claiming that the discovery of the cache was false and an imperialistic hoax.

Despite the billions of dollars of aid which the United States gives to South Viet Nam, the propaganda war being waged by the Allies is considerably inferior to that of the Viet Cong.

All one has to do is turn on a radio set in South Viet Nam. Turning the dial from one end of the band to the other with a Vietnamese standing by, any American will quickly get his answer: "Viet Cong, V.C., V.C., Saigon, V.C., Viet Cong," states the Vietnamese excitedly.

Every other station turns out to be Communist, or North Vietnamese, or a tirade of anti-American propaganda from Sihanouk in Cambodia.

Many of the programs emanating from Hanoi include classical and popular music from the West, especially France; which are often far superior to the programs from Saigon.

Too many of South Viet Nam's radio stations limit their air coverage to the larger towns and their immediate environs. They do not have the power to reach the distant hamlets and villages controlled by the Viet Cong.

Radio Hanoi is clearer in the southern central highlands than Radio Saigon.

Officials from Saigon and Washington who tour the provinces are shown impressive information centers. These are fine. But the only way the government can reach the peasants in Viet Cong country is through leaflet droppings and radio.

One step taken by the U.S. AID mission, USOM, in this direction, is the sale of transistorized radios to the Vietnamese public at minimum cost, even by Vietnamese standards. However, how many radios are getting into those areas controlled and influenced by the Viet Cong? There is where they are needed.

What good are radios to the nationalist cause if most of the programs are Viet Cong-inspired and controlled by Peking and Hanoi?

NEXT — Money-laden G.I.'s replace the French and get all the attention—as well as provoking resentment.